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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT DEBY ACKNOWLEDGES GUEREDA INSECURITY

¶1. (SBU) Summary. President Deby visited Guereda March 22 to deal with ongoing Tama/Zaghawa conflict. In a meeting in Kounoungou Refugee Camp, he acknowledged to refugees, local residents, and the humanitarian community that there were indeed security problems, and said that he would create a new brigade in the area to improve security. The acknowledgement of the problem was well-received, but was followed almost immediately by an attack on the Kounoungou market (presumably by FUC forces), which injured nine people. End Summary.

BACKGROUND

¶2. (SBU) President Deby had last visited Guereda in December 2006. In his meeting with UN agencies and NGOs, he heard complaints about the lack of security in Kounoungou Refugee Camp and Guereda itself. Deby summarily responded that there was no problem with security. Events since then, including apparent targeting of humanitarian operations, have made it clear that the security situation needed addressing.

SECURITY OVERVIEW OF GUEREDA

¶3. (SBU) According to the UNHCR protection officer in Guereda, the Kounoungou Refugee Camp, located 17 kilometers outside of the town of Guereda, has serious security problems. This is attributed to the fact that several different ethnic groups inhabit Kounoungou, including Massariya who recently fled from Jebel Moon. The Zaghawa represent some 46% and Tama some 25% of the camp's population. Moreover, a number of Chadian Tama from the area fraudulently obtained refugee status at the camp at the beginning of the refugee inflow. Their relatives -- FUC members from the seven Tama villages surrounding the camp -- routinely enter the camp to visit, and harass the genuine refugees. (There is a formal Entry Control Point, but the camp perimeter is neither fenced off nor patrolled).

¶4. (SBU) In December 2006, following a peace agreement between the GoC and United Front for Change (FUC) leader Mahamat Nour, FUC soldiers returned to Guereda. Due to problems integrating the former FUC rebels into the Chadian National Army (ANT), the rebels had been assigned to replace the ANT in Guereda. According to UNHCR officials, they then started arming the Tamas in the villages surrounding Kounoungou, and armed and recruited some Tama "refugees." There had been an estimated 1,200 FUC soldiers prior to the peace agreement, but the FUC ranks had now swelled to an estimated 3,000-4,000 armed individuals. Misoffs heard that FUC soldiers would routinely get drunk and then go to Kounoungou and cause problems. The FUC soldiers were not disciplined or trained, and reportedly included child soldiers. The Gendarmerie force guarding both camps consists of 52 gendarmes with a total of eight-twelve weapons.

¶5. (SBU) Waves of insecurity have been occurring for several months. Starting near the end of January, there were shootings in

Guereda itself. On 28 February-1 March, fighting erupted nearby in Birak between Tamas and Zaghwases. Misoffs were informed that the ANT did not respond, but the FUC did, and reportedly fought both the Tamas and the Zaghwases. Wounded Tamas were treated at the hospital in Guereda, but Zaghwases were, and still are, afraid to come to the hospital in Guereda (they go instead to Iriba). The International Medical Committee (IMC), which runs the clinics at the refugee camps, had at one time mobile clinic which visited local villages but this clinic was stopped due to security concerns. On 5 March, due to concern that humanitarians were being targeted, the UN and some NGOs reduced their staffing by 17 people.

President Deby's March 2007 Visit

¶6. (U) President Deby arrived in Guereda on 22 March. At a meeting originally called for March 24, but subsequently postponed until March 25, he addressed crowd of a few thousand refugees and some local villagers, plus humanitarian workers at a Chadian school a short distance from the entrance to the Kounoungou Camp. He told the crowd that he was aware of the details of security incidents in the camps, and expressed his regrets over the killing of two refugees. He paid homage to the gendarmes guarding camps and also told the crowd that they should not bring Sudanese problems into the camp, and that recruitment, arms, and Sudanese rebel activity were not allowed, and that security would be improved. The sub-prefet, rather than the new Prefet (a 29-year old Tama who had worked for CARE's refugee program before joining the FUC), introduced the president, and a representative of the refugee community also spoke briefly. Deby spoke in French and his remarks were translated into Arabic.

¶7. (SBU) President Deby, accompanied by his wife and the Interior Minister, then met privately with the handful of UN and NGO officials. Visiting PRM and S/CRS personnel also attended. Deby

NDJAMENA 00000257 002 OF 002

told them he knew that humanitarians were working under difficult circumstances and that he was there to establish an additional brigade to insure the security of the area. It would be based outside the Kounoungou Camp but would enter it if necessary to support the gendarmes. He encouraged the UN and NGOs to keep up their work there. (Note. New vehicles for such a force were already in Guereda according to the CNAR representative. End note.)

¶8. (SBU) The UNHCR representative thanked President Deby for the visit, but also pointed out that half the humanitarian workers had been withdrawn since November 2006, and that everyone hoped security would improve soon.

¶9. (SBU) The Interior Minister attempted to start a discussion about UNHCR's projects on behalf of the local population (UNHCR has dedicated five percent of its overall budget to projects to benefit the local communities), but was cut off by the President. He arranged to meet separately with the UN and NGOs on 26 March to discuss that issue (Note: Most local projects, such as the mobile clinics and Food For Work (FFW) programs, have been suspended on security grounds. The five percent UNHCR set aside to benefit the local communities is unique to Chad. End Note.)

Presumed FUC Response

¶10. (U) Shortly after President Deby left the area near the camp, the UN and IMC received reports that some armed elements had attacked refugees at the Sunday Kounoungou market place, and kidnapped two people, who were later released. The initial report was that six people had received gunshot wounds. However, the IMC clinic at Kounoungou later reported nine victims had been treated, but none for gunshot wounds. Three with head wounds were transferred to Guereda Hospital. All humanitarians presumed that the attack was by non-reconciled FUC elements angered by Deby's speech and anxious to show that they would not be cowed.

Comment

¶11. (SBU) The security situation in the Kounoungou Camp and Guereda remains poor. However, the fact that President Deby now acknowledges that fact, and Sudanese and Chadian rebel recruitment in the camp, is a positive development. Deby promised to stay in Guereda until the security situation was put on track with the new brigade in place. He was still there on March 26. Wall